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Connections between online gratitude communication and well-being during COVID-19

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Purpose

- Investigate if online gratitude communication can protect users from negative internet consequences and, better yet, improve their well-being.
- Examine if gratitude communication can effectively reduce stress during high anxiety times like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords

- Gratitude: having a sense of abundance, appreciating others' contributions, appreciating simple pleasures, and lastly, they spot the significance of both experiencing and expressing gratitude
- Subjective Well-being: satisfaction with life
- COVID-19: Coronavirus pandemic
- Social Networking Sites (SNS) – social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter



Significance

- During 2018 alone, 360 million people joined the online world, and as of 2019, over 4 billion people worldwide use the internet. To put that into a more precise context, about 57 percent of the entire world uses the internet, with the usual user spending more than 6 ½ hours each day (Kemp, 2019)
- Some adverse effects of SNS showcased by researchers include increased depression (Kross, 2013; Lin et al., 2015), loneliness (Yang, 2016), and anxiety (Reer, Wai Yen Tang, & Quandt, 2019).
- The current situation of COVID-19 and social distancing has more people online to pass the time, gain information on the pandemic, and remain connected to family and friends.
- Since the start of gratitude research, results suggest gratitude positively correlates with well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003) happiness (Chavan, S., Deshmukh, J., & Singh, B., 2017; Singh & Salve 2017), self-esteem (Kashdan et al., 2006), life satisfaction (Wood et al., 2008), stronger interpersonal relationships (Algoe et al. 2008), and much more. Gratitude also correlates negatively with stress and depression (Wood et al., 2008, 2010).

Introduction

Based on previous gratitude work and proposed interventions, I hypothesize that incorporating gratitude communication on internet user's social media platforms will positively correlate with their subjective well-being. Furthermore, using gratitude communication online during high anxiety times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, will positively connect with well-being. Thus, showing that gratitude communication can both increase well-being but also help regulate stressful situations.

Method

- Quantitative examination using self-reported questionnaires via Survey Monkey.
- Correlation analysis between measures.
 - GQ-6: Gratitude Questionnaire
 - SWLS: Satisfaction with Life Scale
- Qualitative analysis on two open-ended questions
 - Has your social media usage increased since the COVID-19 pandemic? If no, why? If yes, why?
 - Have you used social media to express gratitude during the COVID-19 pandemic? If yes, please share your specific experience.

Results

After conducting a correlation analysis between GQ-6 and SWLS, the data supports that of past research; gratitude positively correlates with subjective well-being. Additionally, people are spending more time online since COVID-19, specifically on social media sites like Facebook and Instagram. Participants who have expressed gratitude online, whether it be to a parent, friend, or professional, scored higher on both the gratitude (GQ-6) and well-being scale (SWLS). These results shine a light on the powers of online gratitude communication. Thus, supporting the hypothesis that gratitude communication can be used productively via social networking sites (SNS) to combat the negative consequences of social media use as well as regulate high-stress times like virus pandemics.

Limitations/Future Research

The sample consisted of a convenient group of undergraduate students enrolled at EWU. People outside an academic setting may be responding differently to the current pandemic. Future research consisting of various demographics would be beneficial.